

KNOWLEDGE

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BACK IN THE SADDLE



ARMY STRONG.™

FROM THE DASAF THE REALITIES OF ARMY MOTORCYCLE ACCIDENTS

I don't like to start these columns, or any of my correspondence to the field, with bad news. Truthfully, our Army is still doing very well overall with regard to safety; as of April 28, total accidental fatalities were down four percent from fiscal 2013. That's a great accomplishment, and I don't want to take away from it by focusing on the negative. But, I think it would be a disservice to you and our Soldiers to gloss over the fact that motorcycle fatalities are up sharply from this time last year, that indiscipline is still their leading cause, and that NCOs continue to make up a disproportionate share of the deaths.

Obviously, that kind of news begs immediate consideration. With May being National Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, let's take advantage and give this problem the attention it deserves. We have the entire month to make our Soldiers aware just as riding season gets into full swing for many of our installations. We can't let unseasonably cold temperatures lull us into complacency about our motorcycle riders; the longer they go without riding, the more eager they'll be to hit the road when the days finally stay warm.

The Army does a tremendous job in training Soldiers on motorcycle safety. Civilians in the general population don't have nearly the same training opportunities as our riders, especially progressive training courses that build upon basic skills. There's simply no excuse for Soldiers killing themselves via indiscipline on their bikes, and while it's true leaders can't be with their subordinates 24/7, they can set the example and follow the standards themselves. Honestly, that seems to be where we're falling most short, given that 10 of the 14 motorcycle fatalities reported this year have been leaders.

Command Sgt. Maj. Leeford Cain, USACR/Safety Center, last month published a note to the field addressing this issue (<https://safety.army.mil/ShrinkLink/475>), and I'd like to reiterate a couple of his points. First, what's the status of your unit's motorcycle mentorship program, and are the right people leading it? If you can't answer that question, perhaps it's time to revisit your training and mentor selection. Check out the new "Leader's Guide for Selecting a Motorcycle Mentor" at <https://safety.army.mil> for tips on forming the best team possible. Second, are your leaders disciplined? The leaders we've lost to indiscipline-based motorcycle accidents aren't the only ones out there, but their poor example can have an irreversible impact on our formations if left unchecked or written off as "we can't fix stupid."

Between training, mentorship and disciplined, engaged and accountable leadership, we have the tools we need to reduce motorcycle losses. Each works, and each saves lives. I encourage you to widely share a letter we recently received from a junior leader and motorcycle rider who had a close call with a reckless driver just after finishing required safety training. It's very powerful and speaks to the lifesaving effects of training, if the trainee takes what he or she learns seriously. The letter is available at <https://safety.army.mil/ShrinkLink/476>.

While not directly related to Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, we have important update coming soon: a major overhaul to the Travel Risk Planning System, or TRiPS. Beginning May 5, the system will offer users a wide variety of functionality and upgrades, including better travel planning options, improved user email compatibility, and freestanding applications for smartphones (coming soon). Please make leaders aware of these changes and encourage them to use the upgrades as a means to improved communication with their Soldiers. TRiPS attached to a DA31 will never make Soldiers safe, but it has proven effective when used by first-line leaders to force dialogue with their Soldiers and actually assess and mitigate the risk posed by their travel plans.

Thank you all for the hard work you do every day in safety that directly impacts readiness — I know your jobs aren't easy. It's not my intent to be negative here, but I know you want to face the harsh realities head on. Our Soldiers' lives are simply too important to sugar coat facts, especially when far too many are dying for no good reason. Please let me know what more I can do to help.

Army Safe is Army Strong!

TIMOTHY J. EDENS
Brigadier General, USA
Director of Army Safety



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BACK IN THE SADDLE

LT. COL. MIKE MORGAN

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Just get back from a deployment? How about a mid-tour leave? If you're like me, you're probably itching to take your bike out for a long-overdue ride along some back country roads. A couple of years ago, while home from Afghanistan, I got back in the saddle again, enjoying the freedom only a motorcycle provides. During my leave, I covered nearly 900 miles without a scratch — something to consider when you think about how many Soldiers die on their bikes soon after returning home. Here are some tips to help keep you safe.

Use Your Head

The most important thing you can do is a good risk assessment. This doesn't necessarily have to be difficult. It's mainly using common sense and good judgment to blunt some of your eagerness to do things you shouldn't when you first get back. The things I considered in my personal risk assessment included the condition of my bike, length of my rides and time when I rode. I also considered whether to carry passengers and where I would ride.

Is Your Bike Ready?

You hated putting your bike into storage before you left. I'm certain you did all the right things like changed the oil, connected the battery to a trickle charger and put stabilizer in the fuel. Now that you have returned, it's time to be just as meticulous about your bike's maintenance before riding it on the road. Check the pressure in your tires because it will have gone down. Check your cables to see if they need adjustment. Ensure the nuts and bolts that were tight when you left are still tight now. Dust off your Motorcycle Safety Foundation training and use TCLOCS — tires, controls, lights, oil, chassis and stands — as a guide as you check your bike.

Plan a Reasonable Ride

When I first got back, I wanted to take a 600-plus-mile ride from Fayetteville, N.C., to Fort Campbell, Ky. However, that would have been a high-risk trip because of the hot weather, my need for rest, the length of the ride and the unfamiliar terrain. Instead, I took short rides — none of which lasted much longer than an hour — to brush up my skills. To reduce my risks, I began by riding on back country roads, where I would encounter less traffic. Also, I didn't carry any passengers at first because that dramatically changes a bike's handling. Additionally, I avoided riding at night because of the reduced visibility and huge bugs, which make things less enjoyable. When I did ride after dark, I kept to routes that had bright street lights.

The downside to riding mainly during the day, however, was afternoon temperatures often topped 100 F. As my rides got longer, I needed to make sure I kept myself hydrated. One afternoon, as I was riding back from Myrtle Beach, S.C. (about a 3½-hour ride), I had to take a 30-minute break to drink some Gatorade and sit in the shade. When you're riding and enjoying the breeze, it's sometimes hard to realize just how hot it is.

I also avoided riding in metropolitan areas at all costs. I'm convinced it's a high risk for bikers anytime they ride around a city's shopping district. The worst thing a biker can see in their rearview mirror is a minivan full of out-of-control kids with a driver talking on a cellphone. There are a lot of vehicles that fit that profile in congested urban areas.

Adjust Your Attitude

Even though I've been riding for quite a while, I still think of myself as a novice. I keep that attitude because I still want to be riding in my 90s. If you start thinking you're good, you're likely to get overconfident and turn into an accident waiting to happen. That's why I broke myself in slowly when I first got back, treating every ride as a training session so I could get used to cornering, braking, scanning and positioning in traffic. These are all skills that require constant refinement regardless a rider's experience level.

The Intersection of Safety

When I'm sitting at a red light, before the light turns green, I try to make eye contact with as many drivers as I can. You can never tell what type of effect this has — it's just something I like to do. The key, however, is realizing you'll always come out the loser in a right-of-way confrontation with a car or truck at an intersection, regardless what the traffic light says.



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Dress for the Ride

I wear the required personal protective equipment whenever I ride. Most PPE is reactive, being designed to help you survive a crash. However, one piece of PPE that can help prevent a crash is good protective eyewear. While I was home, I bought a fitted pair of Wiley-X goggles with foam cups designed to keep the wind out of my eyes. They cost way more than I would have ever expected to pay for glasses, but it was worth it to see clearly and keep my eyes from drying out.

Drinking and Riding

I saved this one for last. The bottom line is that I just didn't do it. This is an area of personal responsibility that, despite countless safety briefings, counseling and policy letters, ultimately rests on your shoulders. If you're redeploying from an alcohol-restricted tour, I can understand your desire to imbibe. However, for your sake and that of your friends, family and unit, please don't drink and ride.

Conclusion

Riding is a sport that befits a band of brothers. If you're an experienced, safety-conscious rider, mentor a Soldier who is new to the sport. If you're a leader with Soldiers who ride, show them their safety is your concern. As Soldiers, we are responsible to keep each other safe. As a band of brothers, how can we do anything less?



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END OF THE ROAD

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Back in the fall of 2004, I was one of several convoy commanders providing security in Iraq between Camp Cedar II and Camp Scania. Our mission routine was five days of moving military transportation or third-country national truck convoys up to Camp Scania and then another convoy back to Camp Cedar II, about 150 miles each way. On the sixth day, we went out as the quick reaction force, patrolling up and down the road until the last convoy in our battalion returned from Scania. The seventh day was for rest and recovery.

At this point in our mission, we traversed Main Supply Route Tampa, which still had about 40 miles of unpaved surface. However, the route was under construction, with about a quarter-mile being paved each day. With the construction, jersey barriers were placed out to separate the active traffic from construction vehicles. To say that our unit knew those 150 miles of road is an understatement. The only changes that ever occurred were within the construction area.

On this day, my squad, consisting of three trucks with three Soldiers per vehicle, was the QRF just north of the paved section of road (closer to Scania). We started our vehicles and headed south on Tampa just after the last convoy in our battalion rolled past. During the return trip, I lined up as the last vehicle. As usual, within several feet of hitting the unpaved part of the road, dust kicked up, limiting visibility between our trucks to about 10-15 meters. We increased the distance between the trucks and maintained our speed per our usual standard operating procedures.

About 30 miles into the unpaved area, a familiar line of jersey barriers appeared just to the left of our vehicle. I heard the lead vehicle announce over the radio that one of the barriers had been knocked over and was in our lane. Immediately afterward, I felt our vehicle slam to a sudden halt as my driver quickly applied the brakes. As I put my arm forward to brace my momentum, I noticed the middle truck's rear lights just two or three feet in front of us. My first thought was to get out of the truck and have a word with my second-squad NCO for stopping so suddenly in the middle of the road. With the limited visibility, there was a high risk of being rear-ended by another unit. When I got up to the truck commander's door, I noticed the entire front end of the vehicle is off the ground. I quickly called out for help as I opened the TC's door to check on him, the driver and gunner.

Fortunately, the driver and TC were wearing their seat belts, and the gunner had on his safety strap. The gunner suffered the worst injuries, breaking his arm upon striking it against his mounted weapon. As we treated the gunner and checked the vehicle, I noticed the entire front axle was smashed in and sitting on an overturned jersey barrier in the middle of the southbound lane.

On this day, I let complacency cause one of our Soldiers to be injured. Because we'd traveled that same stretch of road countless times before without issue, we continued the maneuver at the same speed and vehicle spacing even though we had limited visibility. I should have adjusted our movement to the visibility and ordered my lead vehicle to limit our convoy speed. It was an important lesson learned that we carried with us the rest of our deployment.

FROM GOOD TO BAD

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 RYAN TAGGART

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Near mid-air collisions are a danger aviators and air traffic controllers must work together to avoid. There are a number of policies and procedures that assist both in avoiding near misses; however, if the controller or an aviator does not understand the local procedures established at a designated airfield, the consequences can be dangerous. The following addresses issues that should be avoided as well as procedures that should be followed to help prevent a similar situation from occurring.

The night was going as any other while I was signed on as ATC shift leader, behind the local controller, who was doing very well. But what happened next shows just how quickly things can go from good to bad if proper procedures aren't followed.

A C-23 Sherpa called at the 20-mile fixed-wing reporting point. The controller responded with the standard phraseology and instructed the C-23 to report the five-mile ring that represented the controlled airspace. About two minutes later, a flight of UH-60s called at the required point that was one mile outside the controlled airspace. The controller again gave proper phraseology to the flight and instructed the UH-60s to report entering the controlled airspace.

After giving the initial control instructions, I asked the controller what he planned on doing and if he could foresee any problems with what was about to happen. Since the C-23 was about 10 miles from the field and the UH-60s were about six miles out, I knew the helicopters were going to be first in the pattern. But with the speed of the C-23, it was going to be first to the runway.

With that piece of advice, I let the ATC trainee make a control decision. He decided to have the flight of UH-60s make a straight-in approach to the parallel taxiway (Golf) to ensure proper separation and provide the most expeditious flow of air traffic. When the flight called, the controller instructed them to report short final for Golf taxiway and gave a traffic call on the inbound fixed-wing traffic. The flight read back the instructions and acknowledged the traffic call. Almost simultaneously, the C-23 called at five miles inbound. The controller gave them a standard traffic call on the UH-60 flight and informed the C-23 pilot that he would be number one to the runway, with the rotary-wing traffic landing to the parallel taxiway. The C-23 pilot then entered a right base for runway 31 as instructed and acknowledged the rotary-wing traffic and confirmed he was number one to the active runway.

As the situation began to develop, I realized if the rotary-wing flight was not prepared to move to a designated location other than the taxiway after landing, the C-23 would not be able to move down that taxiway to its designated off-load point. I told the trainee to instruct the UH-60s to land north of taxiway Foxtrot on taxiway Golf to not block the only usable portion of Golf. However, the UH-60 flight did not understand the clearance.

The trainee then gave supplemental instructions that Foxtrot was the taxiway closest to the forward arming and refueling point. They were to land on the parallel taxiway north of that taxiway and the FARP to ensure separation with the inbound C-23. I then made sure the UH-60s understood the instructions and located them with the night vision device to ensure they were on course for where they were instructed to land, which they were. They were coming in slowly just north of the tower. The C-23 then called on short final for 31, and I scanned the runway to ensure the landing surface was clear. After I gave the trainee the go-ahead, he issued the landing clearance.

The C-23 was only seconds from touchdown when I refocused my attention on the UH-60 flight and realized they had overflown the parallel taxiway and were headed for a circling left base approach to 13. It was at this point where a split-second decision would make the difference between a lesson learned or the catastrophic loss of coalition aircraft and personnel. I quickly grabbed the handset and instructed the UH-60s to immediately side-step off the active and set down due to C-23 traffic over the approach end of runway 31. The helicopters were able to clear the runway and avoid a collision with the inbound aircraft.

There were many lessons learned during this experience and the problems we encountered can assist any aviation company in the future. Two of the biggest lessons learned pertained to airfield orientation and local control procedures. The pilots were unfamiliar with the airfield, and the controllers were not aware of this because the flight had the same call sign as the medevac flight that was stationed out of this particular airfield. Another problem that arose from this situation was the controllers used local control procedures with a flight that was not a local flight. If these two issues had been addressed prior to this incident, this near miss could have been avoided.



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The procedures that were taken included requiring the flight to perform closed and local traffic patterns until they were familiar with the airfield. The controllers would use more precise phraseology for approaches to Golf taxiway and, if feasible, land all transient traffic on the active runway. These procedures should be taken into account, especially when performing aviation operations in unfamiliar areas, which is a frequent occurrence with the rapid deployment of aviation assets throughout the world.



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A LIFE SAVED

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Editor's note: On April 1, 2014, Sgt. Stacy Norman wrote the following letter to her Motorcycle Safety Foundation training instructors after being involved in a close call while riding her Kawasaki ZX-6R on I-10 East near Lee Trevino Drive in El Paso, Texas. Norman gave permission to Knowledge to reprint the letter in hopes it will show other Soldiers the benefits of rider training. "A vast majority of publicity that surrounds military motorcycle riders is negative," Norman said. "Hopefully, this might encourage some riders to either take the class for the first time or go back for beneficial refresher training."

To the instructors of the Basic RiderCourse and Sportbike RiderCourse,

Last night, as I was riding home on 10E at Lee Trevino, I had a near-death experience. It is only due to the skills and exercises I was taught while attending your class that I am unharmed today. A reckless driver, probably under the influence, was weaving in and out of traffic, driving erratically, and going at least 90 mph in front of me around 7 p.m. while I rode in the far-left lane. This person lost control of their vehicle in the idle lane when they cut off another car, came over left through my lane, smashed into the median and bounced back across two lanes directly in front of me. I was immediately able to brake from 60 mph, coming to a stop no more than three feet behind the car, which was now sideways in my lane. I then attempted to go onto the shoulder to avoid being rear-ended, but this person cut me off, almost hitting me and forcing me to swerve to the right just like we learned in the second exercise. I was able to avoid hitting debris from the wreck, brake safely and swerve out of danger, all thanks to the skills I was taught in your courses. Thankfully, no other vehicles or riders were hit, but it really drove home the point that the biggest dangers on the road to riders are other people. I know most students who come through your classes are there because they have to be and they may not see the benefit of what the classes are meant to teach, but I want you all to know that, at least in this case, I sincerely believe I'm sitting here today thanks to you, and I wanted you to know that. Please keep doing what you do.

Respectfully,

SGT Stacy Norman
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PEACETIME VS. WARTIME ACCIDENTS: A QUICK ANALYSIS

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U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center
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Our Army is quickly transitioning to a predominantly peacetime force, and for a generation of younger Soldiers, it will be their first opportunity to spend extended time at home with family and friends. There has been some concern among leadership and within the safety community that this transition could lead to an increase in accidental fatalities. As the repository for Army accident data going back to 1972, the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center recently studied the question of peacetime versus wartime accidents, and the results were revealing.

To start the analysis, data were consolidated from two distinct time periods: Sept. 11, 1991, to Sept. 10, 2001 (relative "peacetime"), and Sept. 11, 2001, to Sept. 10, 2012 ("wartime"), with both periods comprising exactly 3,599 days each. USACR/Safety Center statisticians grouped accidents by which month they occurred for each time period and ran appropriate analyses to check for significance and proportionality between the measured variables. (Editor's note: The accident information was retrieved from the Army Safety Management Information System on Nov. 8, 2012.)

Off duty

Analysis of off-duty private motor vehicle and personnel injury-other mishaps indicated no statistical significance in the number of accidents and fatalities between the peacetime and wartime periods. There were slightly more off-duty PI-O accidents and fatalities during peacetime than wartime, but numbers were small. Conversely, there were only slightly more off-duty POV accidents and fatalities during wartime than peacetime, but again, numbers remained statistically insignificant for testing methodologies.

On duty: Class A ground accidents

Unsurprisingly, significantly more Class A ground accidents and fatalities occurred on duty during wartime than peacetime: 812 Class A accidents and 637 fatalities versus 474 Class A accidents and 405 fatalities. This finding was consistent for Army combat vehicle, Army motor vehicle and fire/explosives Class A accidents and fatalities. Additionally, more Class A property damage accidents were reported during wartime, but the difference in personnel injury-other fatalities was not statistically significant between the two periods.

A preponderance of Class A AMV accidents and fatalities during wartime were attributed to vehicle rollovers, with a margin of 78.6 percent versus 58.1 for peacetime. While specific factors leading to this increase were not studied, issues with equipment (particularly up-armoring) and training were widely documented during the early and middle years of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Fortunately, those trends have reversed in recent years through quick materiel fixes and aggressive improvements in driver training.

Aviation

Similar to on-duty ground accidents, more Class A aviation accidents and fatalities occurred during wartime than peacetime: 245 Class A accidents and 219 fatalities versus 152 Class A accidents and 135 fatalities. (These numbers do not reflect UAS accidents, which were not considered during this assessment.) A couple of notable differences in primary events leading to these accidents were revealed during analysis, as explained below.

Fuel starvation occurred twice as often during peacetime than wartime (10 occurrences versus five). Four of the wartime incidents occurred CONUS, one occurred in Iraq, and only one was attributed to improper fuel management. The Iraq incident resulted from the crew failing to place fuel pump switches in the proper position; although they conducted proper fuel management, the engines failed as predicted by their fuel burn rate calculations after the single tank they were drawing from emptied (the crew incorrectly assumed the aircraft was drawing fuel from multiple tanks). None of the fuel starvation accidents during peacetime



were a result of fuel management procedures; while some were due to human error, most resulted from materiel failure. There were twice as many engine overtorque/overload events during peacetime than wartime (eight versus four). Additionally, the same number of multiple-aircraft events occurred during both periods (six).

Other than the cases noted above, there were no significant differences in the types of aviation accidents occurring during either peacetime or wartime.

Conclusions

While the number of accidents is fewer, the types of accidents that occur during peacetime are similar to wartime accidents. This finding might seem counterintuitive, but in retrospect it is not unexpected. The Army has espoused the doctrine of “train how you fight” for years. Our findings indicate that, for the most part, accidents that occur in war are similar to accidents that occur in training. Also, off-duty accidents during both peacetime and wartime are nearly identical in number and type. Therefore, should historical precedents hold, we can expect on-duty accidents to decline while off-duty accidents remain roughly the same after the war in Afghanistan draws to an end.

While this might not seem like an exciting conclusion, it does quash a couple of pervasive myths: first, that accidents are inevitable in wartime; and second, that off-duty accidents will inevitably increase after combat. Simply taking “inevitable” out of the conversation is a victory in itself, but we did not do it without turning the tide of history. Accidents almost always rose during and after past conflicts, but this Army — today’s Army — reduced fatal accidents in the midst of the combat cycle. That is truly remarkable, and it should be celebrated as a legacy for the future.

Although it is difficult to quantify “why,” there is absolutely no question the change occurred in the years after top leadership started focusing on engagement in safety. The initial push began in 2003, and since then, strong, engaged leaders who enforce standards and foster a proactive safety culture, assisted by Soldiers who buy in to safety, have made this monumental shift happen. We reached a historic low in accidental fatalities in fiscal 2013, and we are on track to maintain or surpass that this fiscal year. By continuing to do what we know works, we will remain on this downward trajectory. In peace or at war, there are no better goals than saving Soldiers’ lives and preserving combat readiness.

For Army Aviation to maintain readiness, live up to our obligations to ground commanders and sustain the sacred trust earned in battle, we must maintain and improve our momentum in safety and risk reduction, especially during these times of shrinking resources. It is my fervent wish to better assist aviation leaders in achieving that goal by expanding this “first look” at peacetime versus wartime accidental losses and carefully studying further with our Aviation Enterprise partners.



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HANDLE WITH CARE

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Weapons are designed to disable designated enemy personnel and, in the hands of properly trained Soldiers, accomplish this task exceptionally well. We must remember, however, a weapon is the instrument of its operator. It will dutifully shoot in the direction the operator points it. Therein lies the problem of negligent discharges, which are always unacceptable and tragic when a Soldier is injured or killed.

Soldiers in sustained combat operations must handle their weapons frequently. Before deployment, they must undergo repetitive, intensive training at home to prepare for the increased weapons exposure in theater. Manipulating both personal and vehicle-mounted weapon systems is pretty routine for most Soldiers, regardless their occupational specialty.

Perhaps what's most heartbreaking about negligent discharge incidents is, almost without fail, they are all preventable. Weapons safety is taught and emphasized on a daily basis from the beginning of a Soldier's career. How, then, are these negligent discharges occurring? One possibility is weapons handling has become an everyday occurrence for most Soldiers.

Another possibility for these incidents is some first-level leaders have become complacent in the repetitive nature of training their troops on weapons handling procedures. It's incumbent on leaders at every level to ensure the basics of correct weapons handling are taught and enforced throughout their formations. Noncommissioned officers have an even greater responsibility since they're usually present during critical phases of weapons operations such as loading and clearing.

Several safety procedures and mechanisms exist to prevent negligent discharges. One that's often overlooked, however, is also almost 100 percent effective — basic muzzle awareness! If a Soldier should bypass every other procedural and mechanical safety measure other than making sure his weapon is always pointed in a safe direction, it's unlikely anyone will get hurt if the weapon fires. Of course, simply being careful about muzzle direction doesn't give a Soldier permission to skip the other steps of proper weapons handling. Leaders must also constantly reinforce muzzle awareness to the point it becomes habit for their Soldiers.

Likewise, Soldiers must get in the mindset that any weapon, whether it's firmly locked in an armory, has its magazine out, is lying with its chamber open on a bunk or is being carried on a combat patrol, is capable of killing them. Soldiers must be trained to be skeptical no matter how benign a weapon looks. A weapon is a killing machine that's waiting for an opportunity to do so.

These principles apply to those working around weapons as well. Bystanders losing situational awareness or taking proper handling procedures for granted could unexpectedly find themselves on the wrong end of a weapon. By remaining cognizant of their surroundings, other personnel will allow Soldiers to avoid potentially dangerous situations and also provide the opportunity for corrective training.

Current training and deployment requirements dictate Soldiers develop and maintain weapons proficiency. The law of averages indicates that as realistic training and combat deployments continue, so, too, will the relative occurrence of negligent discharges. It's unlikely we'll ever be able to prevent all negligent discharges, but proper training and reinforcement can limit the damage and injury they cause.

FYI

To combat negligent discharges, leaders must change the way Soldiers think about and handle weapons. Both leaders and Soldiers have a responsibility to set the example for others and make on-the-spot corrections. Drill home that your Soldiers must

THINK weapons safety!

Treat every weapon as if it's loaded.

Handle every weapon with care.

Identify the target before you fire.

Never point the muzzle at anything you don't intend to shoot.

Keep the weapon on SAFE and your finger off the trigger until you intend to fire



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FLYING BLIND

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 ANDREW HUDSON
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"We're kickin' up dust, sir!" is what I heard from my crew chief as I lost sight of the ground. It was about 10 p.m. local in Farah Province in western Afghanistan. I was the pilot in command of Chalk 1, an assault UH-60L, tasked to provide a medevac escort. At that point I had about 300 hours of PC time, 1,000 hours of total time and about 200 hours in country. This was our second mission of the day to the same outpost.

About 6 p.m., we got the call, "Medevac, medevac, medevac!" My crew and I jumped into our uniforms and began the launch process that we had cut down to about 15 minutes. I headed to the tactical operations center with the air mission commander to get the mission specifics, and our crews headed to the aircraft to prepare for launch. The 9-line/mission brief was pretty standard and the weather looked good, so the AMC and I covered the necessary brief items for multi-ship ops and headed on our way.

The landing zone was on a friendly forward operating base about a 20-minute flight from where we were based. About 10 minutes into the flight, the visibility started coming down. We took appropriate action and slowed the flight to about 110 knots ground speed. The visibility continued to decrease to about 1½ miles at the time we landed at the LZ. The AMC and I discussed the situation and decided I would lead back to our base because his GPS was malfunctioning. We also decided to take an alternate route that was free of rising terrain.

As we made our way back to our base with the casualties aboard Chalk 2, the visibility continued to deteriorate to about 400 meters. I made the decision to slow to 40 knots and follow a paved road that led directly to our base. Going was slow and stressful, but we managed to make it home safely. We reported the unforecasted weather conditions to higher and returned to our rooms.

About 9:30 p.m., another 9-line dropped for us to return to the same FOB. Having survived the unforecasted weather earlier in a day environment, the AMC and I voiced our resignations to higher about accepting this mission. We were told to execute based on a "legal" weather brief.

Having experienced the dust storm earlier in the day, the AMC and I covered inadvertent instrument meteorological conditions procedures in our brief. Once again, we decided I would lead because of the malfunctioning GPS. Our plan was to use the same ingress route we had flown earlier and away we went.

As we departed Farah, everything was going well. Visibility was excellent and we had plenty of illumination. At almost the exact point as earlier in the day, however, we ran into the same visibility issues (an unforecasted dust storm). As before, we slowed and pressed on. After all, we are on a medevac mission.

So, the visibility was decreasing and my PI said he was having trouble keeping sight of the ground. I took over on the flight controls and we proceeded on our way. As I was flying, I started querying the rest of the crew for information regarding altitude, terrain clearance and any signs of visibility decreasing further. About five minutes after I had assumed the flight controls, I radioed the AMC and recommended we abort the mission and return to base. He concurred with my assessment. I replied I would be executing a 180-degree right-hand turn and heading back to Farah.

While executing the turn, I slowed below 40 knots indicated airspeed and descended to about 60 feet above ground level. It was at that point I heard my crew chief say, "We're kickin' up dust, sir!" A split-second after his call, I lost sight of the ground. I immediately increased my collective, leveled the wings and placed the aircraft in an accelerative attitude. Once the aircraft was under control, I made a call to the AMC, per the tactical standing operating procedure, informing him I was IIMC. He came back and said he was still visual flight rules and called out his heading and altitude. I deconflicted with him by adjusting my heading so we wouldn't converge. At 900 feet AGL, I came out of the dust cloud and the visibility was clear. Chalk 2 and I performed an in-flight linkup and returned to Farah.



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I learned several things from this experience. First, IIMC is an emotional event which is mitigated through training. Second, it is very hard to choose not to go on a mission even though all of the indicators are present. Most importantly, never let anyone pressure you into doing something you know is unsafe. Fortunately, everything worked out for me and my crew, but it could just have easily gone the other way.



ARMY STRONG.



LIFE OR DEATH?

RETIRED COMMAND SGT. MAJ. CLYDE GLENN

I woke up and looked outside at the beautiful August morning in Watertown, N.Y. I was excited because this meant I would be able to ride my motorcycle to work. The riding season in upstate New York is short, so you have to take advantage of the nice days.

I showered, shaved, dressed and then went downstairs and put on all my personal protective equipment, including a long-sleeve shirt, long pants, boots, gloves, reflective vest and helmet. I had the promotion board that morning, so my plan was to ride to a fellow Soldier's house, where I'd change clothes and ride to work with him in his car.

I left my house just after sunrise. The traffic light at the end of my street was green, and I made a left turn to head for the highway. I was now on a four-lane road with a turn lane in the center, heading west at about 40 mph in the far-right lane. There was no traffic in front of me, but I did notice an eastbound car getting off the highway on the other side of the road. All of a sudden, the driver swerved across all four lanes, cutting me off. I had little to no time to react, but I managed to pull in the clutch, try to downshift and start hitting the breaks.

It was no sooner than I hit the brakes that I struck the car between the front tire and bumper. The next thing I knew, I was flying through the air while clinched up tight, just waiting to land. I hit head first with my stomach toward the ground. Fortunately, I was wearing a full-face helmet when my head bounced off the pavement.

I finally came to a rest in a gas station parking lot and almost immediately heard people running toward me to see if I was all right. As I wiggled my fingers and toes to ensure everything was working properly, I could feel the blood running down my face. I wanted to jump up and start yelling at the driver, but I knew I should probably stay put to avoid further injuring myself. Instead, I just laid there and waited for the ambulance to arrive.

So how did this accident happen? It turns out that when I made the left turn onto the four-lane road, the traffic light changed shortly afterward. This meant that the westbound traffic that was stopped at the light had resumed and was about 100 yards behind me. The driver that cut me off was attempting to pull in to the gas station. Instead of getting into the turn lane, she tried to speed across the road and beat the oncoming traffic. To make matters worse, the rising sun was shining directly into her eyes. She never saw me coming and turned right in front of me.

I learned a valuable lesson that day. No matter how safe you think you are on your motorcycle, you're still at risk of other drivers not seeing you. I did everything right that day and still ended up in the hospital. Fortunately, I was wearing all of my protective gear and only suffered minor injuries. My helmet had some deep scratches on the forehead area and down the left side of the face. I am sure it was the difference between life and death.



OUT WITH THE TIDE

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As avid Jet Skiers, my wife and I have been riding on the water for nearly 20 years. We each have our own Jet Ski and consider ourselves to be very skilled riders. We learned, however, that complacency and overconfidence in your abilities can trump experience.

It was a beautiful Fourth of July weekend, and we'd brought our Jet Skis and some friends to Myrtle Beach, S.C., for some fun in the sun. Because of the holiday weekend, it was very crowded and hot. I was unfamiliar with the local area but felt we were experienced enough to overcome any issues we might encounter. I was wrong.

We dropped the Jet Skis in the water and made our way through a creek to a local beach. My friend and I dropped off our wives at the beach and then headed out to open water. We spent a couple of hours racing around the ocean before returning to the beach to eat lunch with our wives. Sufficiently recharged and rehydrated, we then headed back out for more playtime.

Once we were worn out, we went back to the beach, unaware how long we'd been gone. By now, the tide was going out, so we needed to hurry back to the boat ramp. Our friends rode one watercraft, and my wife and I were on the other. As we proceeded back to the boat ramp, we took a wrong turn in the creek and grounded both Jet Skis. My friend's wife jumped off theirs and sank in the mud, slicing her leg open on oyster shells. I knew we were in trouble, as we were about to lose all of the water underneath us due to the outgoing tide. I told our friends to get back on the Jet Ski and gave it a push so they could get moving and find help.

Fortunately, they were able to get back to the boat ramp, but my wife and I were stranded on the oyster bed. So there we were — no water, no sunscreen and no phone or other means of communication. Lucky for us, a man who had been watching us from his house was able to paddle close enough to give us some bottled water. Dehydrated and on the verge of passing out, the water was exactly what we needed. It would be about six hours before the tide came back and gave us enough water to make it to the boat ramp safely.

This experience taught us an important lesson. No matter how skilled you might be in a particular field or activity, complacency and overconfidence can cause more issues than inexperience. We now always travel with extra water, a marine radio/cellphone and have sunscreen on each Jet Ski. We were lucky that day and are determined to never be caught in a similar situation again.



CHECK YOUR PUBS

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 JOSHUA ROBERTS
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Illinois Army National Guard
Peoria, Ill.

After completing more than four years of service, which included a 15-month combat tour in Operation Enduring Freedom as a flight engineer on the CH-47D, and the whole world in front of me, I decided to take up flying. (My journey through initial entry rotary-wing training wouldn't take place for another three years, but that is another story.)

The university I was attending offered a degree in aviation human factors, which is where I learned about a whole new world. Fixed-wing flying is a different animal than what we have grown accustomed to in our Army helicopters. Once you acquire your private pilot's license and are working toward your instrument ticket or commercial rating, there are new dangers that present themselves in the form of boredom and complacency. In many cases you find yourself on a solo cross-country flight, building time with no one next to you to keep you in line and entertained. I was fortunate enough to learn at a young aviation age the need to have all of the necessary publications prior to taking off. Here is that story.

I arrived at Willard Airport in Champaign, Ill., on a Wednesday evening as the sun was setting. My task was to knock out a solo instrument flight rule cross-country flight at night. With the remaining sunlight available, I climbed over the Piper Archer, giving it a detailed pre-flight. I then headed into the operations area to get an updated weather brief before filing my flight plan. It was going to be an easy night with a hop across the state border to do an approach into Lafayette, Ind., back across to Illinois for an approach into Kankakee, and then finally return to the house with an approach back into Willard.

Willard Airport sits in Class C airspace, which makes it relatively easy to depart with an IFR flight plan. After opening the plan with ground and a short conversation with tower, I found myself in no time flying through the air with my handoff to departure. Once I checked in with Chicago Center, I allowed my brain to space off and just enjoy the flight at cruise. What an amazingly dark night it was to be out flying.

It was obvious Chicago Center was not too busy this night because I was caught off guard, and a little early, with them requesting what approach I would like to do at Lafayette. I informed them I would check the automated terminal information system and let them know. I reached over to my pubs pack and starting pulling out approach plates. "This can't be right," I thought. I looked through them again, and then a third time. "You have got to be kidding me," I told myself. I had forgotten to bring the approach plates for the state of Indiana. I felt like an idiot.

Fortunately, I had a little luck on my side. I thumbed through the aircraft's GPS and found that Lafayette had a 09 approach. I informed center that I had picked my approach and was told to switch over to advisory. When I was close to 10 miles out, I was able to pick up local traffic in the pattern landing on 27. "This is just working out perfect," I said to myself with as much sarcasm as I could afford. I decided not to descend below 3,000 feet and, after I flew over the runway, I quickly contacted center to let them know I was on the miss and ready to head to Kankakee.

The remainder of the flight worked out just fine with no more excitement. As I was putting the aircraft to bed, I spent a little extra time thinking about what I was going to take away from this experience. The No. 1 lesson I had that evening was to double-check that you have not only the correct pubs for the mission, but also any you might need for the "what-if" category.



LESSONS LEARNED

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It was a sunny weekday afternoon as we arrived at the hospital. My wife was pregnant with our second child, and I was ready to witness the miracle of a new baby boy. My son was born healthy and strong and came into this world on the ticket of trust that we, as his parents, would do our best to protect him until he is willing and able to go on his own. It started with car seats and child safety locks and then moved on to training wheels, bike helmets and knee pads. The next thing I knew, it was, "Dad, can I borrow the car?" It seemed like he went from infant to young man in such a short time.

As a father, there were many life lessons I wanted to pass along to my children. Little did I know that some lessons were already being taught — and not the way I'd intended. I learned that on a wet December evening, about 10 days before Christmas, when we received the phone call every parent dreads.

"Mom and Dad, I've been in an accident."

When I arrived at the scene, all I saw was red and blue lights and fire trucks. There was no sign of my boy. A police officer told me he had placed my son in the back of a squad car to keep warm because of the snow. When I got to him, it was so good to hug him and hear his voice. His truck had been totaled in the accident, and I realized how lucky I was to find him unharmed. It could have been so much worse.

Witnesses told police that my son had run a red light and another driver making a left turn had turned into him. He told me he was going almost 40 mph at the time of the accident. "Dad, the light changed from green to yellow and the roads were wet and I did not want to slide," he said. "I knew that I could make the light."

As I sat there and listened to him, surrounded by all of the commotion of first responders, it dawned on me where he got his aggressive driving habits. I'm ashamed to say he learned them from me. He spent years watching me drive too fast for the road conditions, slamming on the brakes because I was following too closely and weaving through traffic. He was watching when my speed would increase after passing a cop, joking about how lucky I was to have avoided a ticket. He heard me yell at other drivers when they cut me off. And I, too, always thought I could beat the light. Without realizing it, I had passed my bad driving habits on to my son.

My son's accident served as a wakeup call for us both. We've since changed our driving habits. For me, I'd prefer to pass on lessons about how to be a safe, responsible driver. What about you? What lessons — knowingly or unknowingly — are you teaching your children? Is it time for a change?



SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 CHRISTOPHER M. O'BRIEN
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Camp Beauregard, La.

I don't claim to be a "man's man," but I'm not scared of anything — well, except electricity. There's something about knowing that electricity is all around me that is unnerving. I can't see it and it can kill me at any time if I'm not careful. Nowadays, just about everything requires electricity, and sometimes I am required to (reluctantly) work closely with it.

Electricity shouldn't be a big deal, should it? I mean everything is safely wrapped in protective sleeves and neatly tucked inside the walls and behind electrical outlet covers. Neat and tidy — that's what I had at my house. But I also have a teenage son, and he managed to destroy the entire face of an electrical outlet in our carport. I'm not talking about just part of the outlet being destroyed. Everything plastic was in pieces on the ground, exposing all of the electrically charged guts inside.

I was traveling to Fort Rucker, Ala., the next day to attend the Aviation Safety Officer Course and couldn't leave that outlet exposed for six weeks. I also didn't want to pay an electrician \$150 for a house call that would require only 15 minutes of work. So, against my better judgment, I decided to suppress my fear of electricity and do the work myself. While at it, I figured I would also replace the other old outlet cover in the carport. Easy, right? Wrong!

I know the basics of electricity. I don't poke metal objects into the little slots and I try not to be around water when I'm plugging and unplugging electrical appliances and tools. I also know there's an electric breaker box in the house. If I could figure out which breaker controlled that outlet, I could flip it off so I could safely make the repairs. So that's what I did.

I thought I was smart. I plugged a drop light into the undamaged outlet I'd also planned to replace and told my son to tell me when it went out as I flipped breaker switches. I didn't have to wait long, as the light went out when the first switch was flipped. I then released my son to go destroy other things around the house while I went back into the carport to replace the two outlets.

I chose to replace the undamaged outlet first. I took the drop light out of the outlet, removed the retaining screw from the cover plate and took it off. I then took a deep breath, reached in with my fingers and pulled out the outlet hardware. I didn't get shocked! I was extremely relieved. The rest was easy, only taking about seven minutes to replace the outlet. I figured I had just saved myself \$75 in electrician fees.

Next, I moved to the damaged outlet. Because I'm so nervous around electricity, I decided to plug in the drop light to reassure myself it wasn't live. I reached down, very nonchalantly, and started to plug in the light. When I got about a quarter-inch away from the outlet, there was a huge spark and loud pop. The outlet was still hot! I jumped back, dropped the light and invented 56 new curse words in 10 seconds flat! The pop was loud enough that my wife came running to the carport, where she had a front-row seat to my cursing barrage.

It was obvious what I had to do now — call my dad! After he belittled and laughed at me for a little while, he explained what had happened and a passed on few electrical facts I believe everyone should know. First, just because one outlet is dead doesn't mean the one next to it is too. I guess that should be obvious, but I didn't consider it. Yeah, I bet you already knew that, right? OK, well how about this? Say there are two plug-ins on the same outlet. Did you know that you can put the top plug-in on a different breaker from the bottom plug-in? Sure you did. Well, what about this? You can have a fan light switch and the fan on/off switch on two different breakers. That was news to me. And here's the final thing I learned: Even though you flipped off the breaker to a particular light switch (or outlet), and the light turned off when you flipped that breaker, there is a way electricians can wire it so there is still electricity flowing to the light and not to the switch. All you need to do is touch the live wire and you complete the circuit. Nice, huh!

So what are you supposed to do? Calling an electrician is definitely the safest way to go. Or, you could buy a voltage tester pen, which, when placed near an energized object, will give both an audible and visual signal of an electrically charged danger. This lets you know that there is still a step to be completed before you can safely touch the object without fear of electrical shock. I bought one of these pens with the money I saved by repairing the two previously mentioned outlets on my own. In the future, though, I'll probably just leave the electricity to the professionals.



ARMY STRONG.



WRONG NUMBER

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 NATALIE D. MILLER
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Greenville, S.C.

The flight was my first as a new pilot in command, so I was excited and a little nervous. I planned for an uneventful flight, taking off from our Army base (co-located with a Class D airspace civilian airport), through our unit's training area and then entering into a neighboring Class C civilian airport before returning home.

Overall, the two-hour flight was designed to familiarize a new Readiness Level 1 pilot to a broader section of the local flying area. Since my pilot had achieved RL1 status, he was familiar with the home airfield and local entrance and exit procedures. The intention today was to familiarize him with entering/exiting procedures of the Class C airspace in which we operated.

Throughout our flight he seemed comfortable navigating around our unit's home station and within our training area, about 200 square miles located 20 miles from the base. I was pleased with the flow of our flight. Our preflight had gone well and we had divvied up the duties, filed all the appropriate paperwork and briefed our route and procedures.

Bob (his name has been changed to protect his identity) understood the intent for today's training and expressed enthusiasm to be flying with someone other than an instructor pilot. During the flight, Bob seemed at ease and was competent in his duties on the controls. We used standard terminology, proper clearing procedures, backup navigation techniques and verifying radio traffic. For the majority of the time, Bob remained on the controls and I managed the radios, which included changing the frequencies, setting the GPS to follow-on points and tuning navigational equipment.

During the training area portion of the flight, our transponder read 1200 for general visual flight rules traffic. Upon completion of training within the training area, I requested a northern route toward the Class C airspace. In accordance with our standard operating procedures, air traffic control advised we were under "radar contact" and gave us a squawk, or transponder code, highlighting our position in the sky.

I was on the radios and my PI on the controls. I reached down and pushed in the plugs that corresponded to the numbers into the four-digit window on our transponder. With our attention once again outside, we continued on our flight. I occasionally pointed out good ground reference points on our common northern entrance into the Class C airspace. In accordance with ATC's instructions, we continued our path toward a visual flight rules checkpoint.

About five minutes after ATC gave us our specific transponder code, my pilot was flying straight and level at a heading of approximately 330 degrees. I double-checked the radios and our navigation and continued my cross-check to outside the aircraft. I turned to look at Bob in the right seat and noticed a dark shape floating immediately above and to the right of his helmet. As the realization dawned on me that we were not alone in this little patch of sky, I heard myself say, "I have the controls," and initiated a descending left turn. Bob released his grip on the controls, sat back and took a look at the small white Cessna flying 200 feet above us within ten rotor disks. "I never even saw it," he exclaimed.

So where was the disconnect here? Was our cross-check procedure off? Maybe. Were there blind spots in our scan? Definitely. As my heart rate slowed and I replayed the events leading up to the close call, I couldn't help but think, "Why didn't ATC let us know the proximity of this traffic?"

As I leaned forward to double-check the code in the transponder, I realized I was one number off. I was floored. I'd placed us in danger by not verifying one number! Bob felt responsible for not catching the aircraft in his scan, but there was also a crew chief sitting on that side of the helicopter in the crew seat. Nevertheless, I failed to follow ATC instructions and utilize ATC's safety system, placing the lives of my crew in danger.

Since that day, there is not one assigned squawk code in my aircraft that does not get verified by the other pilot. As my pre-flight briefing clearly states: my co-pilot will cross-check systems and instruments and, in accordance with the aircrew training manual, I shall ask for assistance.



ACCIDENT BRIEFS

AVIATION

AH-64D

Class A

The crew of aircraft No. 1 was conducting assault training with a sister ship when it collided with aircraft No. 2, whose crew was conducting aerial recon of an objective in the vicinity. Both aircraft crash landed, but the crewmembers suffered no significant injuries.

MQ-1C

Class A

The unmanned aircraft had uncommanded movement during taxi. The ground crew pulled the ground data terminal and the local ground data terminal circuit breakers, but the vehicle continued forward until striking a hangar.

GROUND

PERSONNEL INJURY

Class A

A Soldier died when he lost control of his boat and was thrown overboard into a lake. A friend who was with the Soldier was also thrown overboard but rescued by another boater.

DRIVING

PMV-4

Class A

A Soldier died when he lost control of his vehicle and struck a tree.

A Soldier died after his pickup, which was towing another vehicle, was struck from behind by a lumber truck. The Soldier's vehicle subsequently caught fire and he was trapped inside.

A Soldier was ejected and killed when his vehicle left the roadway, struck numerous objects and overturned. He was not wearing a seat belt.

PMV-2

Class A

A Soldier was killed when he lost control of his motorcycle and crashed. He was wearing personal protective equipment and was trained and licensed to operate a motorcycle.

A Soldier died when he lost control of his motorcycle in a curve and struck a sign post on the side of the road.